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Twenty-eighth progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia

I. Introduction

1. The Security Council, by its resolution 2116 (2013), extended the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) until 30 September 2014, and requested me to keep it informed of the situation in Liberia and the implementation of that resolution. The present report provides an update on major developments since my report of 18 February 2014 (S/2014/123), and contains the findings and recommendations of a strategic review and electoral needs assessment missions conducted during the period under review.

II. Major developments

A. Political situation

2. The October 2014 senatorial elections served as the backdrop of developments, with political discourse dominated by controversies over allegations of corruption, perceptions of economic injustice amid weak fiscal performance, community animosity towards concessionaires and public expressions of dissatisfaction with national authorities.

3. The National Elections Commission intensified preparations for the October elections. Between January and March, the Commission updated the voter roll, registering 104,710 new voters, well short of its target of 400,000, which it attributed to public apathy. Just over 1.9 million Liberians are registered to vote, 49 per cent of whom are women. While the Executive Branch has allocated $13.6 million for the elections, delays in releasing the funds hampered preparations. Meanwhile, on 21 May, the Commission requested UNMIL to provide support for the elections. That same day, a court in Monrovia ruled in favour of a petition by the Commission to deregister 15 of 31 political parties for constitutional, procedural and other violations, a decision upheld by the Supreme Court on 23 July. A request to deregister another five parties is still being considered by a lower court. In June, the Legislature passed the Election Law Amendment Bill, clarifying complaint mechanisms and encouraging greater female participation as candidates and party executives. While a code of conduct adopted in March requires lawmakers to declare their assets and

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stipulates that Government officials must resign three years prior to standing for election, so far there has been no monitoring or enforcement.

4. Political parties also prepared for the elections, with the ruling Unity Party (UP) and opposition party Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) holding primaries in June. UP selected its Chair, Varney Sherman, as its senatorial candidate for Grand Cape Mount County and endorsed the re-selection of Senator Gbehzongar Findley of Grand Bassa County, the President Pro-Tempore. Former presidential candidate and CDC standard-bearer George Weah secured the party's nomination for Montserrado County, and CDC Secretary General Nathaniel McGill was nominated for Gbarpolu County. However, procedural issues marred selection processes, and partisans accused party executives of skewing primaries in favour of preferred candidates. The nomination process took place from 2 to 24 July; a provisional list of 140 candidates was announced by the National Elections Commission.

5. Liberia's weak economic performance triggered heated discussions, particularly between the Executive Branch and the Legislature, which intensified oversight activities. The House of Representatives summoned the Minister of Finance and Planning twice in May, requesting an explanation for revenue shortfalls that impeded implementation of the 2013/14 budget. On 16 May, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf submitted to the Legislature a proposed 2014/15 national budget of $529 million, approximately $54 million less than for 2013/14; as at 1 August, the legislative review continued. Responding to public concern about the economy, on 28 May, the President acknowledged declining economic growth.

6. In May, the Legislature conducted public hearings on the General Audit Commission's reports on State entities between 2006 and 2010, though no action followed. The House of Representatives also summoned the Minister of Public Works in July to account for poor performance in infrastructural development and maintenance; earlier, in February, the President announced an investigation into all contracts between the ministry and construction companies, following findings of the International Monetary Fund that contracts were issued without budgetary allocations or proper procurement procedures. Meanwhile, on 15 July, the President announced 48 Government nominations, which are pending Senate confirmation.

7. On 16 June, Christopher Neyor, former president of the National Oil Company of Liberia, published an open letter to President Johnson Sirleaf containing detailed allegations of nepotism, cronyism, corruption and political interference in the management of the oil sector, including the solicitation of bribes, which allegedly were used for her campaign activities in 2011 and now to advance the political and economic prospects of her son, Robert Sirleaf, former Chair of the Board of Directors of the National Oil Company of Liberia. The President publicly denied the allegations, while the House of Representatives and the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission announced their intentions to investigate. Meanwhile, Mr. Sirleaf and Mr. Neyor announced their intention to contest the Montserrado senate seat as independent candidates, respectively, on 17 July and 23 July.

8. Concerns about the Government's commitment to press freedom were triggered by arrests of outspoken critics of the President. Radio journalist Henry Costa was detained in March on charges of "terroristic threats" for statements made during a broadcast about Fomba Sirleaf, the President's stepson and head of the National Security Agency. In July, publisher Octavin Williams was detained and later charged with assaulting a police officer. The Press Union of Liberia publicly

condemned what it characterized as a "classic act of harassment" compelling self-censorship of journalists.

9. Some 500 people gathered on 3 July to protest the ArcelorMittal iron ore company in Nimba County, claiming non-compliance with the company's social commitments. The demonstration escalated into a clash between the Liberia National Police and protesters, some of whom reportedly used firearms and destroyed company property. UNMIL supported the response by national security actors. Many protesters reportedly refused to engage in dialogue other than through their Senator, Prince Johnson. The following day, Nimba County Representative Prince Tokpa was briefly detained after demanding the release of arrested protesters; 57 persons were arrested for kidnapping and terroristic threats, among other charges. On 10 July, President Johnson Sirleaf announced that the demonstration was "an attack on the Liberian economy", and that those involved would be prosecuted. Government ministers and the head of the Nimba legislative caucus subsequently met with the affected communities and constituted a peace and recovery committee.

B. National reconciliation and reform initiatives

10. Delays continued in the national reconciliation process, with the Palava Hut programme launched last October stalled pending the development of an implementation strategy. The national technical forum on reconciliation convened irregularly. While funding has been lacking for reconciliation initiatives, the Government committed $3 million for reconciliation in the proposed 2014/15 budget. In June, a national symposium provided an opportunity to discuss the importance of reviewing national symbols, which is part of the National Reconciliation Roadmap.

11. The Constitution Review Committee, supported by UNMIL and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), continued efforts to advance constitutional reform. Though experiencing resource and organizational constraints, the Committee completed in May simultaneous civic education and public consultations, with support from the Peacebuilding Fund. Thousands of submissions were received during these consultations. As each proposed change requires approval by referendum, the Committee intends to integrate issues arising from consultations into a few proposed amendments, which it aims to submit to the President and Legislature by the end of August.

12. The Ministry of Internal Affairs continued to implement its decentralization programme, including consultations on possible changes to local government structures, although the deconcentration of functions within the 14 entities identified has yet to begin. A draft local government act proposing changes requiring constitutional amendments, including streamlining administrative and statutory districts and cities, and electing local authorities, has yet to be submitted to the Legislature.

13. Proposed acts on land rights and the establishment of a new land authority, as well as policies on land administration and alternative dispute resolution, are under development, while the Legislature passed a land conveyance bill on 22 July. Six land coordination centres established by the Land Commission continued to mediate

disputes, and the Commission is pursuing the development of an alternative dispute resolution policy.

C. Security situation

14. The overall security situation remained generally stable, though fragile. Insecurity was characterized by tensions between concessionaires and affected communities; high rates of sexual and gender-based violence, with 18 per cent of reported cases involving children under 10 years of age; and armed robbery, with one third of cases involving firearms; and inter-communal violence. Incidents of mob violence decreased, owing in part to a joint Government and UNMIL information campaign. UNMIL provided support to national security actors, which continued to face challenges.

15. The incident that occurred on 3 July at ArcelorMittal, described in paragraph 9, was the most serious security incident in almost three years, illustrating that tensions between communities and international concessions represent a significant security concern. Previously, following a week of failed negotiations in April, youths had demonstrated against ArcelorMittal, claiming that the company had failed to meet its social commitments. In March, workers and community members protested against Golden Veroleum, in Grand Kru County, and BHP Billiton, in Nimba County, for the same reason.

16. In March, a confrontation between Christians and traditionalists in Lofa County resulted in the destruction of a church and reported incidents of beatings and abductions. While district authorities settled the dispute, tensions remain.

D. Regional issues

17. The situation in the area bordering Côte d'Ivoire remained generally stable, notwithstanding attacks in Côte d'Ivoire near the border on 23 February and 15 May, resulting in the arrival of 600 Ivorian refugees. Additionally, as I reported in my report of 15 May on the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) (S/2014/342), on 17 February Liberian and Ivorian security forces colluded in the forcible return to Côte d'Ivoire of 21 Ivorians, including 14 holding refugee status, raising concerns of refoulement.

18. On 17 June, a Monrovia court sentenced to life imprisonment 13 Liberians found guilty of mercenarism in connection with two cross-border attacks into Côte d'Ivoire, including the attack that resulted in the killing of seven United Nations peacekeepers in June 2012. Five persons similarly charged were acquitted in May. The case prompted critical reactions from some politicians, alleging targeting of Grand Gedeans.

E. Humanitarian situation

19. Since the start of 2014, 12,022 refugees have returned voluntarily to Côte d'Ivoire with assistance from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), leaving approximately 37,700 Ivorian refugees in Liberia. In March, the Tripartite Commission for the Voluntary Repatriation of Ivorian

Refugees expressed satisfaction at progress towards the return and reintegration of refugees and agreed to accelerate the pace of voluntary repatriation; 37,727 refugees remain in three camps and border communities in Liberia.

20. As indicated in my May report on UNOCI, the Ebola viral disease was confirmed in Guinea, near the Liberian border, on 22 March, subsequently spreading to Liberia and Sierra Leone. By 30 July, a total of 383 cases had been reported in Liberia, resulting in 216 deaths, including of health-care workers. The Government of Liberia, supported by the United Nations, initiated an awareness-raising campaign, including messages carried in local languages on UNMIL Radio, and revised its national response plan with support from the World Health Organization (WHO). However, tradition, denial and community resistance proved difficult to surmount. WHO and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) received $617,000 from the United Nations central emergency response fund on 14 July. While the Tripartite Commission comprising Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire and UNHCR agreed in March to accelerate voluntary returns, facilitated repatriations from Liberia were suspended at the request of Côte d'Ivoire, resuming in June, and suspended again in July amid a second wave of the virus. Facing a continuing pandemic, the Government of Liberia launched an accelerated plan on 30 July, seeking $20.9 million for its response effort.

F. Human rights situation

21. The human rights situation was characterized by an absence of effective mechanisms to guarantee accountability and ensure human rights protection; high incidence of sexual and gender-based violence; and harmful traditional practices.

22. Harmful traditional practices included abduction, forced initiation into secret societies and female genital cutting. Two incidents involving the Poro secret society drew national attention, including the gang rape of a woman in Grand Cape Mount County in April and the abduction and forced initiation of a police officer in Gbarpolu County in May. In June, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the National Council of Chiefs and Elders publicly condemned these incidents, reiterating regulations on society activities. However, the perpetrators were not held accountable.

23. The Government made some progress implementing the national human rights action plan, identifying focal points and developing a monitoring framework. In March, a national action plan on human trafficking was launched, and a proposed strategy for fulfilling Liberia's international human rights obligations is being considered by the Cabinet.

G. Economic situation

24. Economic growth slowed from 8.1 per cent in 2013 to 6.8 per cent in 2014, with revenues affected by reduced global demand for commodities. Inflation rose to 9.8 per cent in April owing to exchange rate depreciation. Between December 2012 and April 2014, the Liberian dollar depreciated by 21 per cent against the United States dollar, 6.5 per cent since mid-January, resulting in reduced spending power for the most economically vulnerable people.

III. Development of national security and justice capacities

A. Security transition

25. The handover of the UNMIL security functions progressed in accordance with agreed timelines. National security agencies continued to serve as first line responders, with UNMIL providing back-up when required. By June, Liberian agencies had assumed responsibility for 81 per cent of static guard duties and all road-bound cash escort functions. Four of 15 counties no longer have UNMIL troops or formed police units deployed, creating public anxiety. Owing to the Government's financial and material constraints, the national security presence remains thin across the country. In addition to providing back-up, UNMIL secures international airports, two prisons and locations related to the security of the President. The proposed 2014/15 budget reflects a 27 per cent increase in allocations for the security sector over the previous fiscal year.

B. National security strategy and architecture

26. A review of the national security strategy continued, as did efforts to streamline the security architecture, with the Ministry of National Security and the National Bureau of Investigation ceasing operations in February. In May, the Ministry of Justice submitted a draft police act to the President that would provide for improved recruitment and promotion systems, as well as stronger oversight mechanisms, while insulating the police from political interference. Preparation of alien and nationality legislation is under way, while proposed legislation on drugs and the Drug Enforcement Agency are pending legislative approval. Liberia drew closer to compliance with regional small arms conventions, acquiring two weapons-marking machines in March that remain unused, and making appointments to the national small arms commission.

C. Liberia National Police

27. Despite some progress, the police struggled with inadequate manpower, limited logistics, particularly vehicles, which fall far short of the requirements, and a centralized organizational structure, which, along with insufficient incentives, perpetuated understaffing outside of Monrovia. In many areas, the police rely on UNMIL for transportation and other operational support. On 26 July, a new strategic plan was launched to guide further police capacity development. With the graduation of new recruits in May, the strength of the police stands at 4,846, of whom 18 per cent are female; 23 per cent of police personnel are based outside of Monrovia.

28. The middle- and senior-level management of the Liberia National Police remained the focus of efforts to improve leadership and command, with 78 officers to date completing training at the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration. In March, the President appointed four senior police officials, including three graduates of the programme. In July, training commenced at the Liberia National Police training centre in Harper, although overall funding and organizational constraints hampered training.

29. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and UNMIL supported national law enforcement in the transnational crimes unit, which had some operational success, despite lacking allocations for permanent operations. Inter-agency collaboration on intelligence gathering, investigation and operations remained weak.

D. Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization

30. Efforts to professionalize the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization continued, including senior management training for 50 officers completed in July. Command-level changes made in June sought to enhance accountability. However, the Bureau requires greater capacity to control Liberia's borders effectively, as well as financial resources to deactivate nearly 600 unsuitable officers. The training of new recruits is pending the completion of the rehabilitation of the Foya training facility.

E. Judicial, legal and corrections institutions

31. In April, the justice and security hub in Gbarnga became fully operational with the inauguration of its circuit court. However, the operations of personnel deployed to monitor human rights and advise on sexual and gender-based violence were disrupted owing to government failure to provide for recurring costs. While construction on the hubs in Zwedru and Harper has not begun, personnel, including human rights monitors, prosecutors and public defenders, have begun providing services. Initial assessments of the Gbarnga hub found that the provision of security services is delayed by centralized reporting lines and command structures, and more public outreach is required. Moreover, sustaining the hubs requires government funding for recurrent costs.

32. As recommended by a management and accountability review conducted in 2013, the Department of Prosecution developed a strategic plan and initiated the training of 20 prosecutors. The Supreme Court continued efforts to standardize court fees and fines to increase judicial transparency.

33. Pretrial detention rates remained high, at 74 per cent. Insecurity at corrections facilities remained a concern, with seven escape incidents and five prison disturbances. Construction of a new prison in Cheesemanburg, near Monrovia, began with support from the Peacebuilding Fund, though government funding will be required for its completion. The Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation faced serious staffing shortfalls. In June, the training of 70 recruits, including 15 women, began. The Bureau has 267 personnel, 20 per cent of whom are women.

F. Armed Forces of Liberia

34. The National Defence Strategy of 11 February 2014, made public in July, defines the role of the army as protecting territorial integrity, disaster response and assisting the police in national emergencies. Under the strategy, the force should reach 2,500 personnel by mid-2015, an increase of some 25 per cent. In April, 134 recruits completed basic training, bringing the strength of the armed forces to 2,040. The code

of military discipline was signed by the Minister of Defence in 2013, but has not yet been ratified by the Legislature.

35. The United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) trained 16 army personnel in explosive ordnance disposal, bringing to 32 the total number of army engineers trained to an intermediate level. UNMAS and UNMIL are supporting the Ministries of Defence and Justice on the modalities, operating procedures and timelines for national assumption of explosive ordnance disposal responsibilities.

36. Liberia continued to contribute a platoon to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

37. On 12 February, the President commissioned two defender boats for the coast guard.

IV. Extension of State authority

A. State authority

38. The Government continued to consolidate its authority throughout the country, though challenges remained with respect to service delivery, which were most acute in the health and education sectors. A report published in June by the Governance Commission outlined these challenges. Services were disrupted by protests by health and education workers over poor or unpaid benefits.

39. The Government prioritized infrastructure, energy and transport, including electrification projects. Construction began on roads to connect Monrovia with Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea, though most of the country remained inaccessible, particularly during the rainy season.

40. Since January 2014, the Ministry of Finance expanded direct payroll deposits to nine counties, facilitating salary payments to county authorities and increasing transparency. In May, the Civil Service Agency and UNMIL carried out joint field assessments revealing that local official absenteeism had reduced since the devolution of some administrative functions. The Ministry of Internal Affairs began a process to eliminate "ghost" and over-age workers from ministry records. Some perceived this as an attempt to remove uncooperative chiefs from the payroll, which could have implications during the electoral period.

41. The Ministry of Internal Affairs maintained a freeze of county development funds imposed in December, pending an audit of 10 funds. In June, the Senate began confirmation hearings for county assistant superintendents for fiscal and financial management appointed by the President to manage the funds.

B. Governance

42. The Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission increased audits, investigations and prosecutions of corruption cases, and reviewed asset declarations, including those of the President. While it investigated two cases involving former government officials, the Commission has not yet taken action against 30 individuals believed to have misrepresented their assets during a verification conducted in 2013.

43. On 15 May, the Executive Director of the Public Procurement and Concessions Commission resigned, citing the reluctance of officials heading some public corporations to abide by procurement procedures.

C. Natural resources

44. Mining and agriculture activities generated tensions between companies and communities. In February, the Government attempted to mediate long-running disputes with communities opposed to the expansion of Equatorial Palm Oil in Grand Bassa County and Golden Veroleum in Sinoe County. Both disputes remain unresolved.

45. In February, representatives of communities in Gbarpolu, Grand Bassa, Lofa and Rivercess counties threatened to halt logging activities unless they received the 30 per cent share of land rental fees owed to them by law. The Government committed to paying $1.5 million, an amount disputed by the communities.

46. In February, the former managing director and five other senior officials of the Forestry Development Authority were indicted on conspiracy charges related to the irregular granting of private use permits. Thirty-four permits remain under review for non-compliance with applicable regulations. In April, a moratorium on the issuance of new community forestry management agreements was lifted, although an internal investigation revealed continued flaws in the award process.

47. Diamond revenues were affected by monitoring difficulties and illicit mining. The report of the March 2013 Kimberley review mission, published in May, outlined areas of non-compliance with the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme, including weak internal controls and records, and an inadequate licensing system.

48. In June, the Liberia Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, reporting on extractive sector revenue during the 2011/12 period, revealed challenges such as poor record-keeping across government entities, and recommended measures to improve revenue collection and compliance, including additional audits and establishment of sanctions mechanisms.

49. In March, the House of Representatives conducted consultations on the draft petroleum bill and the National Oil Company of Liberia, during which participants questioned how Liberians would benefit from revenues stemming from the oil sector.

V. Comparative advantages of the United Nations Mission in Liberia and the country team

50. As indicated in my special report of 16 April 2012 (S/2012/230), the United Nations in 2012 began the civilian transition process, cataloguing UNMIL civilian tasks and conducting a capacity assessment of the country team. As I cautioned in that report, this revealed that the country team was unlikely to be in a position to assume most of the mission's residual civilian functions, and planning should therefore focus on identifying critical tasks that would eventually be transferred to Liberian or other non-United Nations partners, or cease upon UNMIL withdrawal. The process also revealed that, given positive developments in the country, UNMIL

no longer needed to fulfil child protection tasks beyond its general human rights mandate, as support for the protection needs of children is addressed by UNICEF.

51. Further to resolution 2116 (2013), UNMIL and the country team undertook a follow-up exercise to identify their respective comparative advantages. Preliminary findings showed that, generally, there is no duplication of effort, given the fundamental differences between peacekeeping operations and country team members, including mandates and resourcing, as well as integrated planning under "Delivering as one". It revealed several areas central to the mandate of UNMIL where mission engagement is critical, and where synergies with the country team and other partners remain important.

52. For example, while UNMIL has a comparative advantage in supporting access to justice, UNDP, UNICEF and UNODC complement those activities with specialized programming. While UNDP has an advantage in supporting the long-term process of decentralization, UNMIL has greater geographic reach and political leverage to support the process. Support to the constitutional review is a more time-bound process requiring political facilitation from UNMIL, while UNDP provides technical expertise. UNMIL and the country team also have complementary roles with respect to gender and natural resource management.

53. Planning for the reconfiguration of United Nations engagement in Liberia will continue. An effective and sustainable transition from peacekeeping will require considerable efforts to secure voluntary funding for expanding the country team's interventions.

VI. Strategic review

54. As I informed in my report of 15 May 2014 on UNOCI (S/2014/342), the United Nations engagement in West Africa will transform considerably in the coming years, with the ongoing drawdown and eventual withdrawal of UNOCI and UNMIL. While the trajectory in both Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire remains positive, there are still serious political and security challenges, as well as latent threats, which risk undermining the stability achieved over the past decade, facilitated by regional and United Nations peacekeeping operations. I have therefore been cautioning in my recent reports on UNMIL and UNOCI that every precaution must be taken to prevent any serious reversal of the hard-won gains in the region. Prudent planning for their eventual withdrawal is therefore essential, while ensuring that they are adequately equipped to fulfil their mandated tasks and achieve their strategic objectives.

55. Strategic reviews led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and comprising participants from the Department of Field Support, the Department of Safety and Security, UNMIL and UNOCI visited Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire and the border area between the two countries from 7 to 19 February, to assess the strategic contexts so as to ensure that the missions are appropriately configured to perform their core mandated political and security tasks. Military and police capability studies of both missions preceded the reviews. The members of the strategic review received detailed briefings from UNMIL and UNOCI, and in Liberia consulted with President Johnson Sirleaf and members of her Cabinet; members of the legislature; representatives of political parties and civil society; the Governance Commission; the leadership of the national army, police and other security agencies; members of

the donor and diplomatic communities; and the United Nations country team. The team also travelled to Nimba and Grand Gedeh counties on the Liberian side of the border and to Toulépleu on the Ivorian side, in order to consult with civil authorities and security officials; community representatives, including traditional leaders, women and youth; and Ivorian refugees and returnees. The findings and recommendations pertaining to Côte d'Ivoire and the border area, including with respect to intermission cooperation, are contained in my report of 15 May 2014 on UNOCI (S/2014/342).

A. Findings of the strategic review

56. A review of Liberia should be placed in its historical context, including nearly a century and a half of constitutionally sanctioned exclusion of the vast majority of the population, a quarter century of political crisis, and 14 years of successive, brutal civil wars. What has been achieved since peace was restored in 2003, including the return to democratic order in 2006, is remarkable. Socioeconomic indicators have improved, and President Johnson Sirleaf has spearheaded reforms focused on transforming the country. As the President has observed, Liberia's journey has not been easy and it is not over.

57. At the same time, the peace process is far from complete and risks reversal in the absence of sincere efforts to address issues at the root of Liberia's conflict, including exclusion and impunity. The review found a fraught political environment, characterized by deep public distrust of the Government and other political actors, and lack of confidence in national institutions. Many interlocutors provided a sobering assessment of the growing perception regarding a lack of political will and sense of urgency in pursuing an inclusive national reconciliation process, enhancing good governance or pursuing political reforms aimed at enlarging political space and addressing historical injustices deeply entrenched in Liberia's political, economic and social fabric. Meanwhile, stressing their role in a democratic society, civil society and media representatives pointed to examples of Government hostility and tactics they characterized as punitive and intimidating.

58. Dynamics have also been affected by preparations for the October senatorial elections and manoeuvring in advance of the 2017 presidential elections. Pointing to the expected transfer of power to a new Government in January 2018, some interlocutors assessed that much more progress should be achieved during the tenure of the present administration, given its experience and international prestige. Most urgent would be efforts to reform pre-war governance structures widely perceived as enabling a narrow elite to benefit with impunity from corruption, nepotism and cronyism, while most citizens still await the promised peace dividend.

59. There has been no apparent military threat in Liberia for several years. However, risks continue to be posed by civil unrest and mob violence, which ignites quickly, often escalating beyond the capability of national security institutions. Moreover, risks remain that could be exacerbated by latent threats, many of which led to the civil war, including deep divisions characterized by ethnic and regional tensions, economic inequality and competition over national resources, land disputes and the incomplete integration of former combatants. Serious concern was also expressed about the large population of unemployed, unskilled youths having

nothing to lose from violent or other antisocial behaviour, who are vulnerable to manipulation for political or other ends.

60. In 2012, the United Nations and the Government of Liberia agreed that the gradual handover of the UNMIL security responsibilities would be conducted gradually over two to three years, during which time the Government would accelerate the build-up of national security capacity. It was further agreed to combine a progressive geographic and functional handover of the UNMIL security responsibilities, while the mission would simultaneously continue its military drawdown. To date, there has not been any major security incident in areas that no longer have an UNMIL military presence, though public perceptions of insecurity is high, as deployment of additional national security personnel in those areas has been limited, amid budgetary and other constraints.

B. Recommendations of the strategic review

61. Given expectations that the 2017 presidential election and subsequent transfer of power to a new administration in January 2018 will be a sensitive period for the country, the security transition process, specifically the full handover of the UNMIL security tasks to national authorities, should conclude no later than 2016. This would provide the Government with nearly two years to consolidate its efforts to fully assume all its security responsibilities, including those most vital to national security. It was also assessed that lack of progress on sensitive processes such as national reconciliation and inclusive political reforms has contributed to a continuing disarticulation between the operational achievement of security sector reform and security sector governance. Therefore, at this stage of Liberia's post-conflict recovery, it was assessed that there was a need to reimagine United Nations support for the country. It is therefore recommended to further adjust the UNMIL military and police components, as detailed in section VIII below, while also strengthening the mandate of UNMIL in critical areas related to national reconciliation and political processes, including through an explicit good offices role for the Special Representative.

VII. Electoral needs assessment mission

62. The Liberian National Elections Commission, in a letter dated 29 January 2014, requested United Nations assistance in preparing for the presidential and legislative elections scheduled for October 2017. Accordingly, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, in his capacity as the United Nations focal point for electoral assistance activities, deployed an electoral needs assessment mission to Liberia from 2 to 13 May, which included representatives from the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and UNDP.

63. The assessment mission consulted broadly with Liberian and international stakeholders, including the Commission; ministers and other senior Government officials; Supreme Court justices; legislators; the Governance Commission; the Constitutional Review Committee; representatives of opposition political parties and civil society; media; members of donor and diplomatic communities; UNMIL; and the United Nations country team. The mission assessed the political and electoral environment and evaluated the legal and institutional framework for the elections

and the capacity of national elections stakeholders to develop recommendations on the electoral assistance the United Nations should provide. The assessment mission based its recommendations on the requirements for building national capacity to conduct electoral operations.

A. Findings of the assessment mission

64. Considerable attention is already being focused on Liberia's third post-conflict presidential elections, scheduled for October 2017, with speculation about who would succeed President Johnson Sirleaf, who is constitutionally serving her last term in office. Meanwhile, preparations are under way for the 2014 senatorial elections. Many parties have begun efforts to consolidate leadership and other party structures, generating conflict within some political parties, while the campaign period is scheduled to begin on 12 August. The high degree of interest in these elections has heightened tensions among political parties, and between parties and the Commission, in the absence of a fully functioning dialogue platform. The deregistration of some parties was also controversial.

65. The situation remains stable, but fragile, given underlying tensions that could be exacerbated during the electoral period, unless political and social challenges are properly addressed, and socioeconomic development fairly benefits communities, including unemployed youths. Interlocutors also expressed unease about election security as UNMIL continues to draw down, given the slow build-up of national security capacity.

66. Efforts to revise the legal framework for elections are under way. The constitutional review could have implications for the 2017 elections, as several issues relevant to elections and the scope of presidential appointments have been proposed. In accordance with the Constitution, a national referendum on each proposed change would have to be held at least one year after legislative approval. A review of the electoral law has been under way since 2012, with a draft proposal before the Legislature that would give the Commission greater autonomy, though it maintains some contentious provisions, including the presidential power to appoint all seven commissioners, subject to Senate confirmation, which opposition parties believe compromises the independence and impartiality of the Commission.

B. Recommendations of the assessment mission

67. In view of the possible escalation of political and social tensions, as well as Liberia's history of electoral violence, the mission recommended that all Liberian stakeholders, supported by the United Nations and other international partners, should redouble their efforts to facilitate constructive dialogue and undertake other measures to provide reasonable guarantees that electoral outcomes would be accepted by all stakeholders. It further recommended that the Inter-Party Consultative Committee, which provides a forum for dialogue and engaging political parties, should receive additional support to strengthen its effectiveness. Efforts are also required to enhance the participation of women in electoral processes, both as voters and candidates.

68. Given the primary responsibility of Liberian institutions for organizing and conducting elections, the mission considered that building local capacities,

including for logistics, should be the primary focus of international electoral assistance, which would mostly be provided through a UNDP-managed project. The Commission would need to develop sustainable solutions for addressing the persistent challenge of accessing remote areas for electoral processes.

69. UNMIL is not currently mandated to provide electoral assistance. The mission recommended that the mandate of UNMIL be revised to include the provision of logistical support to facilitate access to remote areas during the 2014 elections. UNMIL should also work closely with national stakeholders to support the development of a national security coordination mechanism involving all institutions with a role in providing, financing or overseeing election security.

70. For the duration of its presence in Liberia, UNMIL, working closely with UNDP, should coordinate electoral assistance to ensure harmonization and prevent duplication. UNMIL should also have a mandate to support Liberian stakeholders in creating an environment conducive to the conduct of peaceful elections, including through an explicit good offices role for the Special Representative.

VIII. Proposed adjustments to the United Nations Mission in Liberia

A. Military component

71. As indicated in my previous reports, UNMIL has been progressively drawing down since 2006, bringing the mission from its peak of 15,250 troops to its current strength of 4,619 military personnel. The force comprises four infantry battalions, including a battalion-sized quick reaction force (2,750 troops); force headquarters (82 staff officers); enabling units (1,654 personnel); and 133 military observers.

72. In my special report of 16 April 2012 (S/2013/230), I presented recommendations for the further drawdown of UNMIL in three phases through mid-2015, taking into account the threat environment and assessment of the time required for building national capacity to assume the UNMIL security responsibilities, which would bring the mission to approximately 3,750 troops concentrated in Monrovia and sensitive border areas. By its resolutions 2066 (2012) and 2116 (2013), the Security Council endorsed those recommendations, while reaffirming the primary responsibility of the Government for security and protecting civilians. The second phase of the drawdown was completed in June 2014; consequently, UNMIL no longer has a military presence in 7 of 15 counties.

73. Owing to the challenges experienced by the Government in assuming greater security responsibility, it would be prudent to maintain the drawdown timelines agreed in 2012, which would involve reducing a further 988 military personnel by mid-2015, leaving UNMIL with 3,631 troops, including three battalions deployed in Monrovia and at the borders with Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea. Specifically, the adjustments would include the repatriation of the quick reaction battalion (650 troops) and military enablers, including one engineering unit (191 personnel), transport elements (30 personnel), a military hospital (60 personnel), staff officers (29) and military observers (28).

74. However, it could be possible to accelerate the military drawdown, taking into account the lack of an apparent military threat, while ensuring that the mission

retains critical enabling capability, bringing UNMIL to a strength of 2,619 troops by mid-2015. This could be achieved by repatriating the battalion and enablers as detailed in paragraph 73 above, in addition to the battalion deployed at the border with Guinea (700 personnel), as well as additional engineering assets (207 personnel) and additional transport elements (105 personnel).

75. Under both options, in order to project military effect, UNMIL would focus on high-risk areas, while shifting to a more mobile posture, requiring the retention of all its military helicopters, and enhancing situational awareness and early warning capabilities. UNMIL would continue to protect the population within its capabilities and areas of deployment, without prejudice to the primary responsibility of the Liberian authorities.

76. In view of the recommendation to complete the security transition by mid-2016, it would be possible to drawdown further by then, bringing the UNMIL strength to one battalion and required enablers by mid-2016, which would be consolidated in Monrovia, in order to provide a rapid response capability to assist national security services in protecting the population as required. The regional quick reaction force to be established within UNOCI in accordance with Security Council resolution 2162 (2014) could provide over-the-horizon support to UNMIL in the event of a serious deterioration of the security situation in Liberia, without prejudice to its primary responsibility for providing security in Côte d'Ivoire.

B. Police component

77. As at 1 August, UNMIL police strength stood at 1,434, out of an authorized strength of 1,763 personnel, including 498 police advisers, 1,265 personnel in 10 formed police units and 32 correction advisers. There are now eight formed police units deployed in Liberia: three in Monrovia; one each in Gbarnga, Greenville, and Voinjama; and one has been split to cover Tubmanburg and Buchanan and another split to cover Zwedru and Harper.

78. In its resolution 2066 (2012), the Security Council authorized the deployment of three additional formed police units. As indicated in my last report, one unit was deployed to provide temporary support for the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) in January, while another was diverted to support the start-up of MINUSMA. It is feasible to maintain the UNMIL police component at the currently deployed level of eight formed police units. However, given the enhanced requirements for supporting the development of the national security services, no reduction of UNMIL police advisers is recommended. Additional advisers would be added within the authorized ceiling to support the reform efforts of the national immigration service.

C. Support implications

79. The poor and limited infrastructure in Liberia presents unique challenges for UNMIL. During the six-month rainy season, roads become impassable and cannot sustain major logistics movements, and require repair during the dry season to allow transport operations. There are no in-country commercial alternatives to the UNMIL military engineering units that keep critical supply lines open; there are also serious shortfalls in the national medical system. Despite the military drawdown, UNMIL is

still required to support civilian personnel, including police, deployed throughout the country. While commercial alternatives to the UNMIL military enablers may be procured from outside of Liberia, this option would be prohibitively expensive. Given the serious logistical challenges, UNMIL must retain military enabling capabilities for the duration of its presence in Liberia, or the mission would not be able to fulfil its mandate. The Government and the country team have been advised to identify alternative options for their access to remote areas once the UNMIL enablers are withdrawn.

D. Safety and security of personnel

80. The Government has primary responsibility for ensuring the safety and security of United Nations personnel and installations. While that capacity is being developed, the United Nations relies on UNMIL as back-up for its civilian security structure, which is sufficient in areas of the country without UNMIL troops, as the threat to the Organization is assessed as low. Since 1 February, three incidents of armed robbery targeting United Nations personnel were reported, in addition to 30 non-weapons-related crimes. Two national staff members, one soldier and one police officer, died.

IX. Financial implications

81. The General Assembly, by its resolution 68/291 of 30 June 2014, appropriated the amount of $427.3 million, equivalent to some $35.6 million per month, for the maintenance of UNMIL for 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015. By the same resolution, the General Assembly decided to assess among Member States, without setting a precedent, $213.6 million limited for the period 1 July to 31 December 2014. Should the Security Council decide to extend the mandate of UNMIL beyond 30 September 2014, the cost of maintaining UNMIL until 30 June 2015 would be limited to the amounts approved by the General Assembly.

82. As at 30 July 2014, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for UNMIL amounted to $147.5 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to $4,747.9 million.

83. As at 30 June 2014, amounts owed to troop and formed police contributors totalled some $13.1 million. Reimbursement of troop/formed police and contingent-owned equipment costs have been made for the period up to 30 April 2014 and 31 March 2014, respectively, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

X. Observations

84. The October senatorial elections will be a litmus test for Liberia's third post-conflict presidential elections in 2017, which will be a watershed and measure of sustained stability. The elections have set the context for political realignment and heightened tensions, while also prompting clashes in concession areas. I welcome the readiness of the National Electoral Commission to maintain dialogue with political parties, an important factor in managing a credible electoral process, even

as it faces heightened scrutiny. I would also urge the Government to ensure the provision of adequate funding for the elections.

85. In 2011, the National Electoral Commission conducted elections that international observers considered generally credible, although controversy, including an opposition boycott and violence on the eve of the presidential run-off, prompted national and international stakeholders to stress the urgency of constitutional and electoral reforms to improve perceptions about the legitimacy, transparency, fairness and inclusiveness of elections. Continuing opposition perceptions about the partiality of the Commission, and general public discontent with public sector performance and the overall political environment, are therefore concerning. The United Nations will respond positively to Liberia's request for electoral assistance for the period 2014-2018, primarily through a project managed by UNDP.

86. I am encouraged that the security situation has remained calm as UNMIL draws down, and welcome the excellent cooperation between the Government and UNMIL on transition planning. However, while the handover of security functions has progressed according to agreed timelines, limited national security presence and crippling resource constraints raise concerns about national capacity to sustainably fill gaps. It is encouraging that the Government has proposed increased allocations for the security sector in the 2014/15 national budget, pending legislative approval; however, there remains an urgent need to identify funding sources to address the urgent logistical and mobility gaps of the Liberia National Police.

87. I would also stress the critical need for an overarching strategy for addressing institutional weaknesses, which will become even more apparent as Liberian institutions assume greater security responsibility. It will be important that the Government formulate a concrete plan, with timelines and benchmarks, for building its security sector in tandem with the UNMIL drawdown, detailing leadership, coordination, monitoring and resources. Maintaining momentum in efforts to professionalize the Liberia National Police is essential. Oversight mechanisms are also critical and, in that regard, I would urge the early passage of the Police Act. I also welcome that many recent appointments to the police's senior leadership have come from within the ranks, and would encourage further reform of promotion and manpower policies, with a view to reducing over-concentration of the police in Monrovia.

88. The Constitution Review Committee has made important progress, despite facing serious constraints, including tight timelines, and concerns of civil society regarding a perceived predetermination to narrow the constitutional review. I would stress to all parties the importance of a transparent and inclusive process that meets the expectations of all Liberians.

89. I remain concerned about the slow pace of taking forward meaningful national reconciliation, including by addressing structural inequalities, enhancing accountable governance and building the democratic foundations of a nation reflecting the aspirations of all Liberians, and would urge the people and Government of Liberia to bring a renewed sense of urgency to the important work of building a unified nation for the future, while healing the cleavages of the past. The five-year anniversary of the release of the important report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission at the end of June provides an opportunity to help transform the social and institutional fabric of the country.

90. Natural resources are essential to the Liberian economy, and should provide equitable benefits for the economic development of all and the consolidation of peace. The Government has a critical role to play in mitigating conflict, enhancing transparency and reducing corruption. In that regard, I would urge the Government to implement appropriate consultation and dispute resolution mechanisms, and fast-track ongoing land reform initiatives.

91. Important progress has been made in decentralizing justice and security services through the hub in Gbarnga and the initiation of services by future hubs in Zwedru and Harper. However, it will be critical that the Government provide for the hubs' recurring costs. It is concerning that a high incidence of sexual and gender-based violence persists, and I would reiterate the importance of addressing impunity and strengthening the rule of law throughout the country.

92. Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone have been hit by a devastating outbreak of the Ebola viral disease, which has taken the lives of far too many. I wish to pay tribute to the national and international health-care workers and community leaders who have lost their lives treating the sick and sensitizing people about this highly contagious virus. In all three countries, fear, denial and distrust undermine the efforts of the brave women and men who are so courageously working to prevent its further spread. I welcome the efforts made by the Governments to contain the virus. The United Nations will continue to fully support those efforts, and I call upon partners to urgently and generously support the Governments of these three countries in controlling this vicious epidemic.

93. While some of the 13 Liberians convicted of the crime of mercenarism were implicated in the killing of seven UNOCI peacekeepers in June 2012, I wish to reiterate my expectation that Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire will bring the perpetrators of that international crime to justice, and that Liberia will domesticate the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. I welcome continued efforts to implement the Mano River Union cross-border security strategy, and would encourage the two Governments to work together within this framework, with support from UNMIL and UNOCI and the United Nations country teams.

94. Liberia's institutions remain weak, limiting the ability of the Government to deliver services to its citizens in most sectors. Building professional, effective and credible national institutions will require a renewed effort on the part of the Government to ensure the allocation of appropriate financial and human resources, and that reforms are undertaken to enhance transparency. In that regard, I welcome measures such as the passage of the code of conduct for civil servants, and would urge the implementation of complementary policies to address the continued lack of accountability, including empowering the Anti-Corruption Commission to impose sanctions.

95. At this juncture, we must reimagine the role of the United Nations in Liberia, with UNMIL enhancing its focus on core political and security tasks. I therefore recommend that the Security Council extend the mandate of UNMIL for one year, until 30 September 2015, while supplementing the political role played by my Special Representative with an explicit good offices mandate, which would focus on facilitating national reconciliation and political reform, and an environment conducive to peaceful and transparent elections, which includes due attention to the rule of law. I also recommend that the mission be mandated to provide logistical support for the October 2014 senatorial elections, limited to facilitating access to

remote areas. United Nations support for subsequent electoral processes would focus on supporting the coordination of international assistance, to ensure coherence, as well as national capacity-building.

96. Though Liberia no longer faces any apparent military threat, national security institutions are still working to develop their capacity to maintain stability and protect the population without support from a peacekeeping operation. I would therefore recommend the drawdown of UNMIL uniformed personnel, as elaborated in paragraphs 73 and 78 of the present report, resulting in an authorized strength of 3,631 military and 1,515 police personnel by mid-2015. The primary focus of UNMIL would be protecting civilians within its capabilities and areas of deployment.

97. Looking ahead to the sensitive period that Liberia will enter in 2017, I further recommend that the security transition conclude by mid-2016, at which point the Government should fully assume security responsibility throughout the entire country. UNMIL would therefore draw down to one battalion and appropriate enablers, or some 1,500 troops, by mid-2016, which would remain until the withdrawal of the mission. I welcome resolution 2162 (2014), authorizing the establishment within UNOCI of a regional quick reaction force that could deploy in Liberia in the event of a serious deterioration of security, as well as its approval to use all UNMIL and UNOCI military aviation assets in both countries. However, Liberia will require long-term support for sustaining its institutions, and should explore options for bilateral or regional partnerships in preparation for the withdrawal of UNMIL.

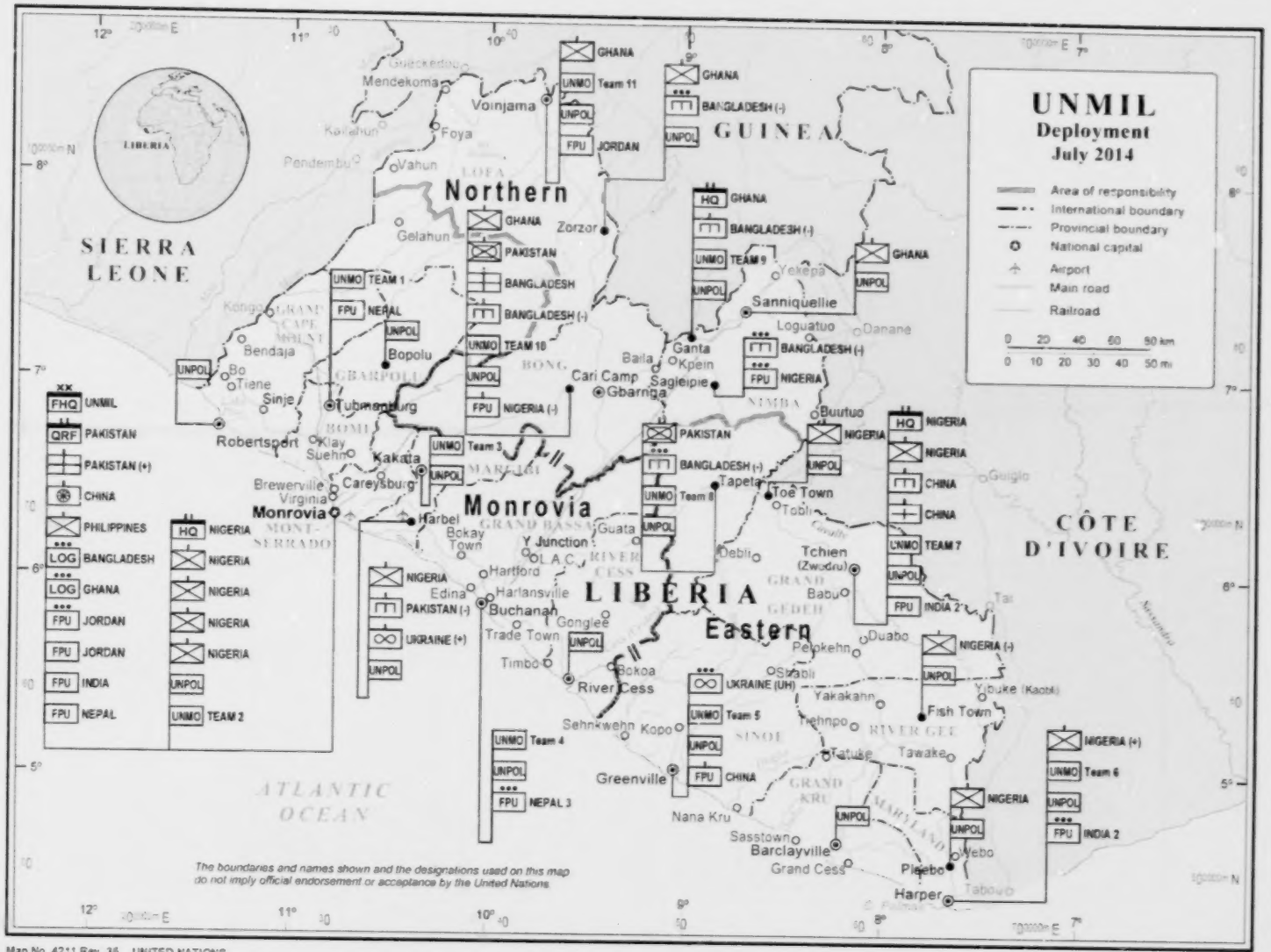
98. I wish to express my appreciation to my Special Representative for Liberia, Karin Landgren, and all United Nations civilian and uniformed personnel for their commitment to peace in Liberia. I am also grateful to troop- and police-contributing countries, the African Union, ECOWAS, the Mano River Union and other regional organizations, multilateral and bilateral partners, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, non-governmental organizations and other partners for supporting the consolidation of peace in Liberia.

Annex

United Nations Mission in Liberia: military and police strength as at 1 August 2014

	Military component					
Country	*Military observers*	*Staff officers*	*Troops*	*Total*	*Formed police units*	*Civilian police*
Argentina	0	0	0	0		12
Bangladesh	13	7	508	528		15
Benin	1	1	0	2		0
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	2	1	0	3		0
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0	0	0	0		9
Brazil	2	2	0	4		0
Bulgaria	1	0	0	1		0
China	2	6	558	566	140	19
Croatia	0	2	0	2		0
Czech Republic	0	0	0	0		0
Denmark	3	2	0	5		0
Ecuador	2	1	0	3		0
Egypt	7	0	0	7		5
El Salvador	2	0	0	2		2
Ethiopia	9	4	0	13		0
Fiji	0	0	0	0		27
Finland	1	3	0	4		0
Gambia	1	0	0	1		16
Germany	0	0	0	0		5
Ghana	9	9	693	711		30
India	0	0	0	0	243	7
Indonesia	1	0	0	1		0
Jamaica	0	0	0	0		0
Jordan	1	5	0	6	234	13
Kenya	0	2	0	2		24
Kyrgyzstan	3	0	0	3		4
Lithuania	0	0	0	0		1
Malaysia	6	0	0	6		0
Mali	0	0	0	0		0
Mongolia	0	0	0	0		0
Montenegro	1	0	0	1		0
Namibia	0	3	0	3		3
Nepal	2	3	15	20	260	16
Niger	1	0	0	1		0

Country	Military component				Formed police units	Civilian police
	Military observers	Staff officers	Troops	Total		
Nigeria	13	7	1 397	1 417	120	16
Norway	0	0	0	0		7
Pakistan	9	8	890	907		0
Paraguay	2	1	0	3		0
Peru	2	1	0	3		0
Philippines	2	1	114	117		29
Poland	1	0	0	1		3
Republic of Korea	1	1	0	2		3
Republic of Moldova	2	0	0	2		2
Romania	2	0	0	2		4
Russian Federation	3	0	0	3		10
Rwanda	0	0	0	0		5
Samoa	0	0	0	0		0
Senegal	0	2	0	2		0
Serbia	4	0	0	4		6
Sri Lanka	0	0	0	0		15
Sweden	0	0	0	0		14
Switzerland	0	0	0	0		2
Thailand	0	0	0	0		3
Togo	2	1	0	3		0
Turkey	0	0	0	0		17
Uganda	0	0	0	0		14
Ukraine	2	2	206	210		19
United States of America	4	5	0	9		4
Uruguay	0	0	0	0		3
Yemen	0	1	0	1		9
Zambia	3	0	0	3		16
Zimbabwe	2	0	0	2		30
Total	**124**	**81**	**4 381**	**4 586**	**997**	**437**



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